776
796 lest their extreme sanctity might increase the powers
778 of the goddess to a dangerous extent. Poojahs are
[793] daily offered to her. An annual festival known as the
[782] Bharani, connected with this goddess, plays a most important part in the religious history of Malabar. It comes off in the Malayalam month of Meenam (about
788 March or April). Pilgrimages undertaken to the temple
796 on this occasion are potent enough to safeguard the pilgrims, and their friends and relations, from the perilous attacks of cholera and small-pox. Hence people resort thither annually by thousands from almost all parts of Malabar; and, the more north you go, the stronger will you find the hold which the goddess has
[782] upon the popular imagination. The chief propitiatory offering on the occasion is the sacrifice of cocks. In fact, every family makes a point of undertaking this sacred mission. People arrange to start on it at an auspicious moment, on a fixed day in small isolated bodies. Preparations are made for the journey. Rice, salt, chillies, curry-stuffs, betel leaves and nuts, a little turmeric powder and pepper, and, above all, a number of cocks form an almost complete paraphernalia of the pilgrimage. These are all gathered and preserved in separate bundles inside a large
[293] bag. When the appointed hour comes, they throw this
[481] bag on their shoulders, conceal their money in their girdles, and, with a native-fashioned umbrella in the one hand and a walking-stick in the other, they start, each from his own house, to meet the brother pilgrims at the rendezvous. Here a foreman is selected practically
[533] by common consent. Then commences the vociferous recitation of that series of obscene songs and ballads, which characterises the pilgrimage all along. The foreman it is that opens the ball. He is caught up by others